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ABSTRACT

The Servicemembers Opportunities Colleges (SOC) is a consortium of national education associations and more than 1,200 colleges and universities that have pledged to ease the difficulties faced by servicemembers seeking a postsecondary education. Consortium members subscribe to the following principles in offering voluntary higher education to servicemembers: (1) servicemembers should share in the postsecondary educational opportunities available to other citizens; (2) educational programs for servicemembers should rely primarily on programs/courses/services provided by appropriately accredited institutions and organizations; and (3) to enhance access to undergraduate educational opportunities for servicemembers, institutions should maintain a necessary flexibility of programs and procedures (particularly in admissions, credit transfer, course scheduling and formats, and academic residency requirements). In addition to the general protections and services provided by SOC, six service-specific degree network systems and programs have been developed that allow participating servicemembers to earn associate and bachelors degrees in 33 fields. Three degree delivery options are available: traditional delivery, alternative delivery, and learning assessment. Other SOC programs are as follows: developmental coursework to provide access to postsecondary education; outreach to veterans; and extension of postsecondary education opportunities to servicemembers' family members. For 25 years, SOC has been a model for giving servicemembers access to postsecondary education. (Contains 20 references.) (MN)

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Providing Access to Education for United States Military Personnel: The Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Model

by

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Providing Access to Education for United States Military Personnel: The Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Model

Introduction

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges is a consortium of national education associations and over 1200 colleges and universities pledged to ease the difficulties of servicemembers seeking a postsecondary education. In cooperation with the Department of Defense, the military services and the Coast Guard, SOC works to coordinate between the Department of Defense and the academic community, and to articulate to each the requirements and needs of the other.

SOC is sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the American Association of Community Colleges. Its twelve cooperating national-level higher education associations are the:

- American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers,
- American Council on Education,
- Association of American Colleges and Universities,
- Association of American Universities,
- Career College Association,
- Council on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation,
- Education Commission of the States,
- Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities,
- National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education,
- National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities,
- National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges,
- National Association of Systems Heads, and
- State Higher Education Executive Officers.

SOC's two sponsors, thirteen cooperating associations, the military services, the National Guard Bureau, and the Coast Guard each appoint at least one member to the SOC Advisory Board. The SOC Advisory Board, comprised of presidents of national associations or their representatives, presidents of colleges and universities in those associations, and military representatives, offers policy guidance for the operation of SOC and approves the *SOC Principles and Criteria*, which are discussed below. The Department of Defense and the military services provide SOC funding.

SOC began as an outgrowth of a 1971 task force of over 50 leaders in education, military, and other areas led in part by the American Association of Community Colleges. A Carnegie Foundation of New York grant paid the early developmental costs. Today, the Department of Defense and the military services provide funding through a contract with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. This Association serves as the administrative "home" of Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges. (A history of the first 25 years of SOC was published in September 1996 and is available.)

SOC Principles and Criteria:

Colleges and universities that are members of SOC subscribe to *SOC Principles and Criteria* as a condition in offering voluntary higher education programs to hundreds of thousands of servicemembers, civilian employees of Department of Defense, veterans, and family members. SOC Principles embody institutional

flexibility in programs and procedures appropriate to the needs of servicemembers, yet recognize the necessity to protect and assure the quality of educational programs.

Following are the Principles upon which SOC is founded:

Principle 1. In order to enhance their military effectiveness and achieve their educational, vocational, and career goals, servicemembers should share in the postsecondary educational opportunities available to other citizens.

Principle 2. Educational programs for servicemembers should rely primarily on programs, courses, and services provided by appropriately accredited institutions and organizations, including high schools, postsecondary vocational and technical schools, colleges, and universities.

Principle 3. To enhance access to undergraduate educational opportunities for servicemembers, institutions should maintain a necessary flexibility of programs and procedures, particularly in admissions, credit transfer, and recognition of other applicable learning, including that gained in the military; in scheduling and format of courses; and in academic residency requirements to offset servicemembers' mobility, isolation from campuses, and part-time student status.

SOC Criteria stipulate that institutional policies and practices be fair, equitable, and effective in recognizing special and often limiting conditions faced by military students. As a minimum, each SOC institution:

(1) designs its transfer practices to minimize loss of credit and avoid duplication of course work;

(2) limits academic residency requirements for active-duty servicemembers to no more than 25 percent of the undergraduate degree program and avoids any "final year" or "final semester" residency requirement;

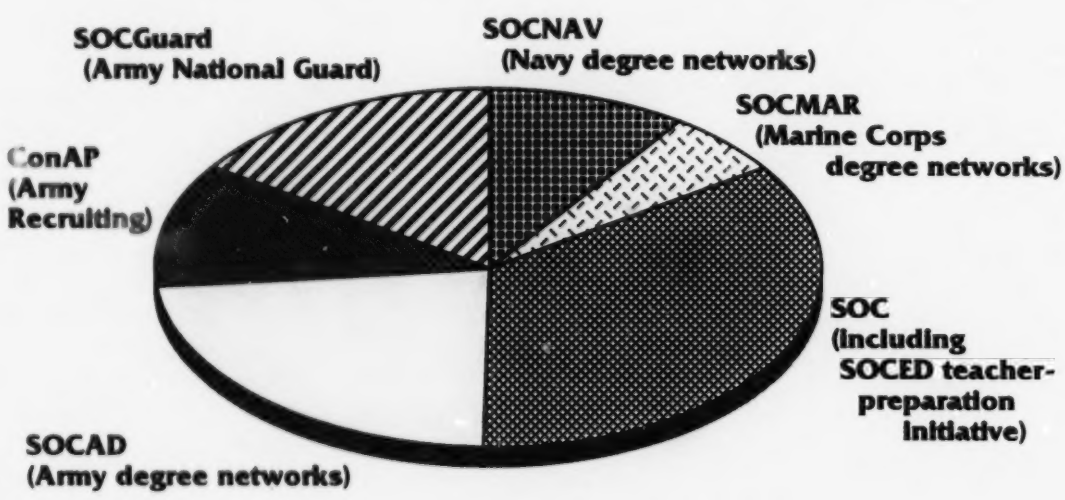
(3) recognizes and uses the American Council on Education's *Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services* to award credit based on military training courses and experience; and

(4) awards credit through the use of at least one nationally recognized, nontraditional learning testing program such as the College Board's College-Level Examination Program (CLEP); American College Testing Program Proficiency Examination Program (ACT/PEP) and Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support Subject Standardized Tests Program (DSST).

The SOC Criteria constitute an operational framework for each SOC college or university to extend to servicemembers' educational opportunities that are sometimes distinct from common institutional practice. The Criteria ensure the flexibility that is essential to improving the access of servicemembers to undergraduate education. SOC Criteria focus member institutions on blending nontraditional credits earned through training and job experience and through distance education into traditional college degree programs. Institutions accomplish this by recognizing and awarding credit based on the American Council on Education's *Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services* (Criterion 3) and two other American Council on Education publications: *Guide to Educational Credit by Examination* and *The National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs*.

SOC membership is necessary for institutions to offer undergraduate courses on Army installations, and membership is quite commonly required of participants in memoranda of understanding with all of the services. Application for membership in SOC includes an affirmation of the institution's compliance with *SOC Principles and Criteria* signed by the institution's president, chancellor or other administrator authorized to assume this obligation. The Director of SOC has the authority to approve or deny membership. (There is an appeals process involving the SOC Advisory Board.) Membership in SOC is renewed every two years and is documented in a biennial publication, the *SOC Guide*. The *Guide* summarizes each institution's policies regarding nontraditional learning, any military installations on which it serves, the name and phone number of a point-of-contact, and provides other pertinent information.

Figure 1



SOC Programs and Projects

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges is composed of several models aimed at specific functions and constituencies. All of the Services and their personnel, both active and reserve, however, are served by SOC institutions. In addition to the general protections and services provided by SOC, at the request of the Army, the Army National Guard, the Navy, and the Marine Corps, Service-specific degree network systems and programs have been developed. These systems require extensive articulation among member colleges and universities that offer certificate/diploma, associate and bachelor's degree programs related to the students' military jobs.

In response to these requests for specific, tightly integrated programs, SOC operates six degree network systems:

- SOCAD-2, the associate degree system for the Army and the Army National Guard;
- SOCAD-4, the bachelor's degree system for the Army and the Army National Guard;
- SOCNAV-2, the Navy's associate degree system;
- SOCNAV-4, the Navy's bachelor's degree system;
- SOCMAR-2, the Marine Corps' associate degree system; and
- SOCMAR-4, the Marine Corps' bachelor's degree system.

These systems consist of groups of regionally accredited SOC colleges and universities that offer degree programs accessible to soldiers and sailors worldwide. Member institutions guarantee to accept each other's credits in transfer. SOCAD-4, SOCNAV-4, and SOCMAR-4 members guarantee a minimum 45 percent transfer or award of credit for those students who have completed an appropriate SOCAD-2, SOCNAV-2, and SOCMAR-2 associate degree, respectively.

Other SOC programs and projects include the Concurrent Admission (ConAP) for the Army Recruiting Command, an outreach program for the Army National Guard (SOCGuard), a teacher preparation program (SOCED), and a program for the Navy emphasizing developmental education (SOCNAVPREP). Each of these initiatives is described below. The comparative level of effort is shown in Figure 1.

SOC Degree Networks

In order to effect detailed articulation in a meaningful manner, associate degree and bachelor's degree programs have been grouped into networks. Each network consists of a number of programs in a specific curriculum area. (See Figure 2 for current SOC associate and bachelor's degree networks.) The SOC staff reviews associate and bachelor's degree programs offered in support of Army, Navy, and Marine personnel and places them in networks appropriate to the curriculum. Curriculum exhibits are prepared by SOC based on the current catalogue and information provided by the offering institution. These curriculum exhibits are coordinated fully with the offering institution and all other institutions that offer programs in that network. Prior to publication, every institution has the opportunity to review the exhibit of every other institution in the network. Any difficulties with transferability of credit are therefore addressed before publication and transferability can be guaranteed.

Figure 2

Current SOC Associate and Bachelor's Degree Networks

Accounting (LA),
AC/Heating/Refrigeration,
Applied Science & Technology,
Automotive Maintenance,
Aviation Maintenance (AD),
Aviation Management,
Aviation Technology,
Banking/Finance,
Business Administration (LA),
Computer Studies (LA),
Construction Technology,
Corrections, Criminal Justice (LA),
Diesel Maintenance,
Digital Electronics (LA),
Drafting (LA),
Electronics Technology,
Food Service Management,
General Business (AD),
General Studies (AD),
Health Services Management,
Human Resources Management,
Information Systems Mgmt (AD & LA),
Interdisciplinary Studies (AD & LA),
Management (AD),
Marketing/Retailing,
Medical Records, Nursing (LA),
Office Management (LA),
Paralegal Studies,
Professional Aeronautics,
Public Administration, Security,
SOCED (Teacher Preparation),
Technical Management,
Training/Instruction, Welding

AD = Alternative Delivery LA = Learning Assessment

Once approved, exhibits are published in the systems' handbooks used by all network system members and by all Army, Navy, and Marine Corps in-service education officers, specialists and counselors. The specific guarantees, the appropriate transfer courses, recommended credit for military training, work experience, and tests are all listed in the handbooks, which serve as complete operating manuals for their respective systems. Handbooks are updated and published annually.

Most of the networks focus on technical and management curriculum areas and were designed to be relevant to servicemembers' military jobs. However, when SOC began development of the SOCAD system in 1978, the Army expressed a requirement for associate degree programs that emphasized general education and nontraditional credit awarded based on the *ACE Guide* and testing in addition to programs that could be grouped in technical and management networks. In response, SOC established the Flexible Network. Associate degree programs meeting the following criteria were listed in the Flexible Network:

- The institution required no more than 65 semester hours or 97 quarter hours for degree comple tion in any curriculum offered within the Flexible Network;
- The institution required as prescribed courses no more than 50 percent of the total credits required for the degree completion in any curriculum offered within the Flexible Network;
- The institution allowed a minimum of 50 percent of the total required hours in learning expe riences within the Flexible Network;
- The institution awarded credit for service schools and military experience as recommended in the American Council on Education's *Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services*.

The development of the bachelor's degree systems in 1987, beginning with the Flexible Network, required the associate degree systems to articulate 2-year programs into 4-year programs. The Flexible Network was split between those associate degree programs that contained sufficient general education to articulate into 4-year programs and those associate degree programs that did not have the amount and/or the flexibility within their general education requirements to provide guaranteed transferability. Those curricula within the Flexible Network with a minimum of 30 semester hours or the equivalent of General Education courses, not including Physical Education and Health, formed the new SOCAD-2 and SOCNAV-2 Interdisciplinary Studies Networks, which would articulate into 4-year degree programs. Those that did not meet this criterion formed the General Studies Network. No guarantees exist regarding the articulation of the associate degrees included in the General Studies Network with any 4-year program.

Currently, the Interdisciplinary Studies Network consists of curricula characterized by flexibility in which General Education courses make up a large portion of the requirements. Each curriculum also contains a large number of general education and free electives. Examples of degree program titles include: Interdisciplinary Studies, Individualized Major, and Social Science. Students who complete an associate degree in any SOCAD-2, SOCNAV-2, SOCMAR-2 Interdisciplinary Studies curriculum are guaranteed to receive the transfer or award of 45 percent of the degree requirements when enrolling in a bachelor's degree curriculum in either the SOCAD-4, SOCNAV-4, or SOCMAR-4 Interdisciplinary Studies network, within the stated limitations of the specific curricula found in the *SOCAD-4 , SOCNAV-4 , SOCMAR-4 Handbooks*. This same articulation has been done for other networks.

A "Contract" between College and Servicemember

A student participating in any SOC degree network may request an official evaluation of all prior learning at any time after he or she is eligible. Institutions may require up to six semester hours of course work with the college or university before an official evaluation is conducted. The request for an official evaluation automatically causes the college or university to issue either a SOCAD, SOCNAV, or SOCMAR Student Agreement. It is the responsibility of the student to request that all transcripts and other necessary documents be provided the college or university that is conducting the official evaluation. The institution that conducts the official evaluation and issues the Student Agreement is the "home college" for that soldier, sailor or family member.

The Student Agreement reflects credits awarded or transferred in by the home college based on the student's prior learning. It then serves as the student's academic plan showing precisely what courses and requirement still must be fulfilled. In essence, it is a contract for the degree between the home college and the student.

Guaranteed transfer always moves back to the home college. However, these transfer guarantees are valid only after the Student Agreement is issued. All institutions that are members of SOC network systems have agreed to issue a Student Agreement on the standard SOC form for each student who applies for an official evaluation in a program that is part of a SOC system network. For the SOC systems to work for the servicemember-students for whom they are designed, it is imperative that home institutions comply with their obligation to issue SOC Student Agreements when their students become eligible for them.

Samples of performance data for SOCAD, the largest and oldest system are shown in figures 3-6.

Figure 3

System/Year	SOCAD-2	SOCAD-4	TOTAL
1982	985	0	985
1983	2,730	0	2,730
1984	5,833	0	5,833
1985	6,084	0	6,084
1986	8,761	0	8,761
1987	12,615	661	13,276
1988	15,959	2,717	18,676
1989	17,352	2,876	20,228
1990	23,159	5,149	28,308
1991	20,429	4,837	25,266
1992	23,849	4,825	28,674
1993	22,290	5,137	27,427
1994	24,581	5,609	30,190
1995	24,729	5,151	29,880
1996	24,183	4,347	28,530
TOTAL	233,539	41,309	274,848

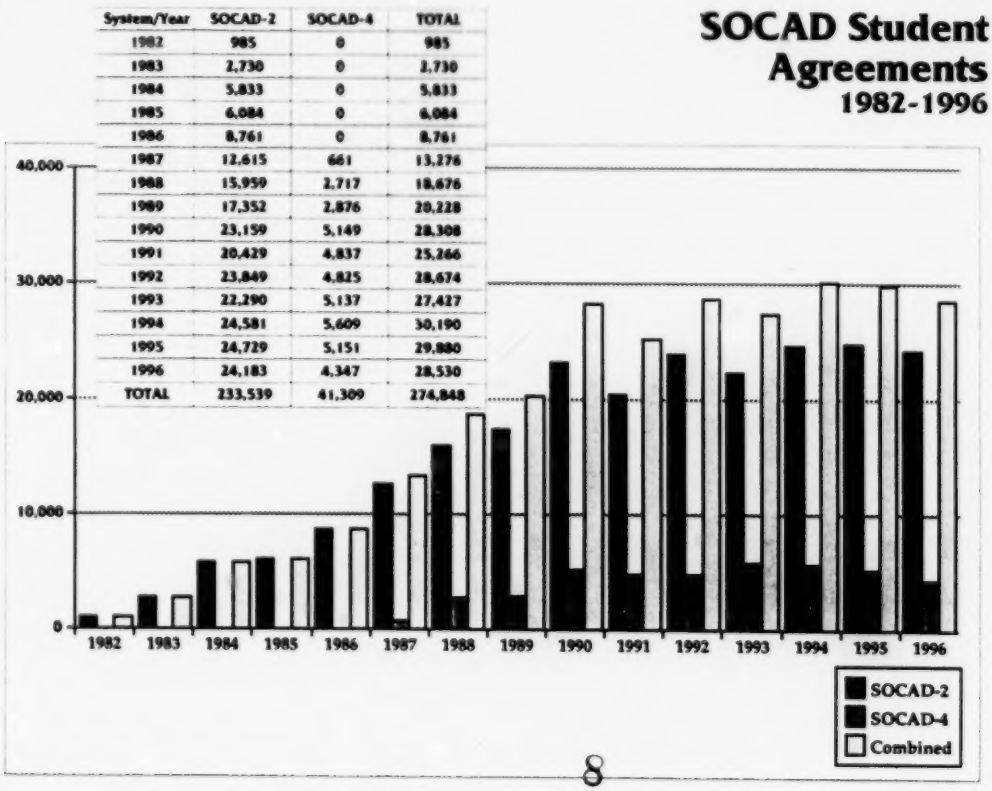
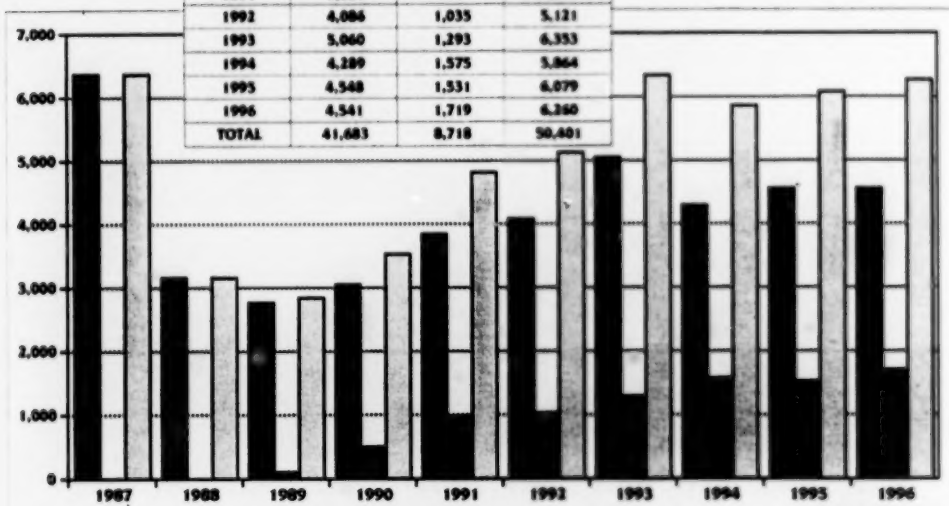


Figure 4

SOCAD Graduates
1987-1996

System/Year	SOCAD-2	SOCAD-4	TOTAL
1987	6,373	0	6,373
1988	3,155	0	3,155
1989	2,751	100	2,851
1990	3,043	495	3,538
1991	3,837	970	4,807
1992	4,086	1,035	5,121
1993	5,060	1,293	6,353
1994	4,289	1,575	5,864
1995	4,548	1,531	6,079
1996	4,541	1,719	6,260
TOTAL	41,683	8,718	50,401

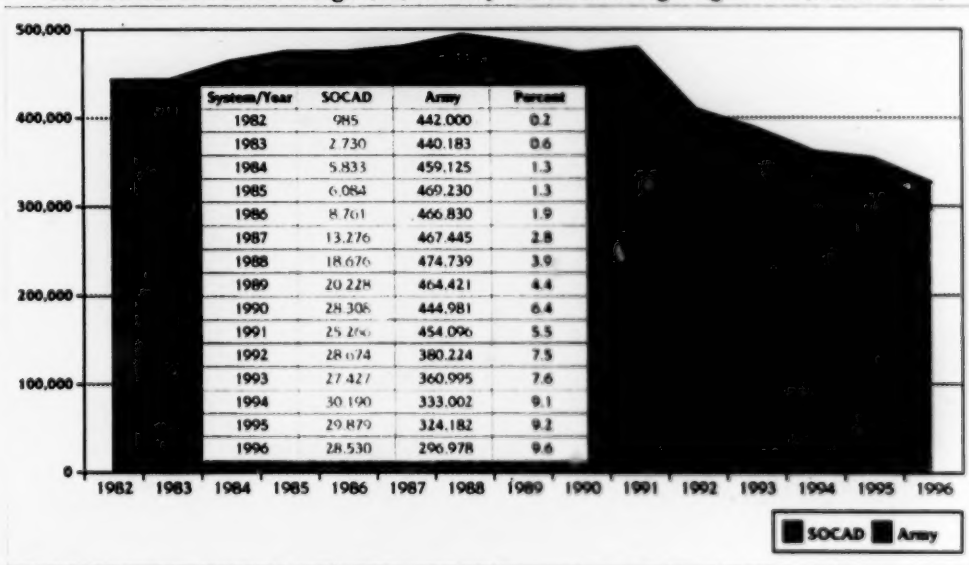


Note: The first survey of graduates was conducted in 1987 and covered the period 1982-87. Annual surveys followed. Each shows July 1-June 30 data concluding in the year indicated.

Figure 5

New SOCAD Student Agreements Compared to Army Enlisted Strength (E-4 and Above)
1982-1996

Note: SOCAD data current through 9/30/96. Army data current through August 1996 (Source: DMDC).



System/Year	SOCAD	Army	Percent
1982	985	442,000	0.2
1983	2,730	440,183	0.6
1984	5,833	459,125	1.3
1985	6,084	469,230	1.3
1986	8,761	466,830	1.9
1987	13,276	467,445	2.8
1988	18,676	474,739	3.9
1989	20,228	464,421	4.4
1990	28,308	444,981	6.4
1991	25,276	454,096	5.5
1992	28,674	380,224	7.5
1993	27,427	360,995	7.6
1994	30,190	333,002	9.1
1995	29,879	324,182	9.2
1996	28,530	296,978	9.6

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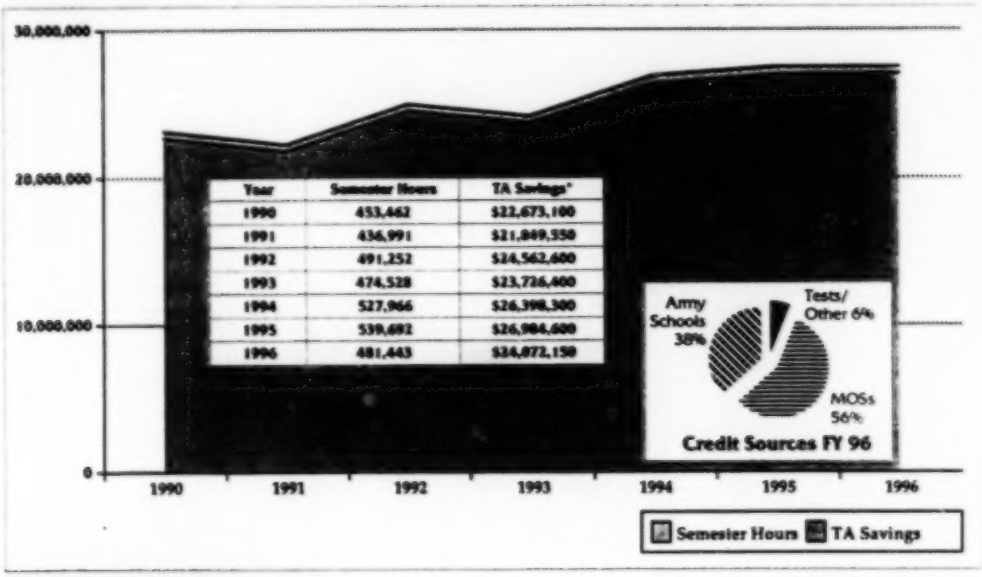
Figure 6

Non-Traditional Credit Documented on SOCAD Student Agreement Forms
1990-1996



Year	Semester Hours	TA Savings*
1990	453,462	$22,673,100
1991	436,991	$21,849,550
1992	491,252	$24,562,600
1993	474,528	$23,726,400
1994	527,966	$26,398,300
1995	539,692	$26,984,600
1996	481,443	$24,072,150

SOCAD
SOC Army Degrees

Some advantages for the learner to use the SOC network system is shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7

The SOC Network System Advantage

- **A SINGLE EVALUATION** ... the servicemember is evaluated once by the home college, and the resulting degree plan is the on-going basis for all future course selections after relocating to other installations and colleges — and for graduation.
- **EARLY EVALUATION** ... after not more than 6 SH credit
- **LIMITED ACADEMIC RESIDENCY** ... 25% maximum
- **NO STARTING OVER** ... when reassigned, the soldier follows the home college's SOC Student Agreement evaluation and degree plan

Degree Delivery Options Improve Servicemember Access to Education.

In blending traditional and nontraditional postsecondary education, SOC continuously identifies and explores educational programs, systems, courses and processes that encourage and assist soldiers, sailors, and marines in thinking and acting on their own and in concert with others. High quality independent study and distance learning degree programs offer this type of encouragement and assistance. Their integration into SOC network systems in 1988 increased student learning opportunities.

Often soldiers and sailors are unable to participate in traditionally delivered courses and programs. Alternative delivery educational programs allow students to participate while being physically at isolated military sites or on board ships around the world.

Currently within the six SOC network systems, three degree delivery options are available:

- **Traditional Delivery Option** consisting of curricula normally provided through classroom-based instruction but with liberal policies for accepting coursework offered through distance learning methodologies. Institutions offering programs in this option require some academic residency for graduation.

- **Alternative Delivery Option**, an external degree option, consisting of those curricula in which the college or university delivers instruction through some type of independent study. Institutions offering programs in this option require some academic residency for graduation.

- **Learning Assessment Option** consisting of curricula that require no academicresidency or graduation. The degree may be based entirely on college credits derived from evaluation of learning from other sources or transfer of credit from other institutions.

Once degree programs in the Alternative Delivery Option were integrated into the SOC network system, SOC began to identify independent study courses offered through distance learning methodologies that were comparable with traditional courses. SOC works closely with the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) in ensuring that external degree programs listed in its *Guide to External Degree Programs* are integrated, where possible, in SOC's Alternative Delivery and Learning Assessment Options. Likewise, SOC coordinates its independent study course selection with DANTES and cross-references specific courses with *DANTES' Independent Study Catalog*.

Servicemember-students and institutions can be confident that the Alternative Delivery and Learning Assessment Options are, in fact, viable options for offering and receiving high quality education. All colleges and universities in these options are regionally accredited. Their programs are selected because of (1) their relevance to specific SOC networks, (2) the interest of the institution to work with servicemembers and to comply with *SOC Principles and Criteria* and the institutional requirements for membership in SOC's networking systems, and (3) their reputation for meeting the American Council on Education's *Principles of Good Practice for the Institutions Providing the Voluntary Education Program on Military Installations.*

Even though the academic atmosphere of the traditional classroom with its face-to-face interpersonal contacts may be lost or lessened through the alternative delivery or learning assessment options, this methodology may help student-servicemembers develop into "autonomous learners." One of adult education's primary goals is to encourage adult students become autonomous learners while empowering them with

knowledge, skills and understanding needed for working and living in society.

Colleges and universities in the traditional delivery option blend credits earned through nontraditional methodologies into relatively traditional classroom-based degree programs, and external degrees earned through distant learning methodologies blend credits from traditional classroom instruction into nontraditional degree programs. For many servicemembers and veterans, nontraditional programs are the programs of choice. Their integration into an overall networking system is important for the military student.

SOC-Degree Planner (SOC-DP)

Based on the results from the model and other DANTES/SOC considerations, SOC and DANTES agreed in early 1993 for SOC to assist DANTES in the production of a computer-driven degree planner that would facilitate educational counseling of servicemembers and help institutions, counselors, and servicemembers themselves in degree planning and management. This program intended to depict the various ways a servicemember might earn and be granted academic credit, and integrate credit potential from various sources into most SOC Learning Assessment Options and Alternate Delivery Options, about 15 institutions. The SOC-DP concept includes traditionally-delivered degree programs, in the SOCAD/SOCNAV/SOCMAR format, on a progressive basis, adding more institutions with each Program iteration, and integrating DANTES external degree institutions as compatible. The original intent was for DANTES to contract for the production of the software. SOC would act as academic liaison in the software production process, and validate the program itself for accuracy and academic integrity.

SOC-DP objectives, as stated in the original concept, follow:

- To ensure the maintenance of high standards in the depiction of credit recommended for military learning, and in the integration of credit recommendations into degree programs. To provide for validation of degree planning data by a recognized entity of the national higher education community.
- To assist counselors in their efforts to advise servicemembers by providing degree planning materials. To support the official documentation that will continue to be supplied by military and academic authorities.
- To demonstrate, using contemporary technology, the value of learning already obtained through military experience and training, by distance learning, and through testing. To show how to integrate credit recommendations with curriculums and to display a plan of study on a draft "contract for degree."
- To facilitate degree completion and save tuition assistance dollars by:
  - ensuring the inclusion of coursework from all possible sources, traditional and non-traditional, eliminating duplication and loss of time and effort;
  - including SOC course category numbers on products generated by the SOC-DP Program;
  - better relating SOC course category numbers to service school credit recommendations, military occupational experience, testing, and other forms of nontraditional learning;
  - integrating CCAF transcripts and DANTES external degree programs into the process as much as they are or can be made compatible;
  - encouraging institutions to grant appropriate credit for military learning in degree programs pursued by servicemembers; and

- promoting the use of testing and distance learning methodologies by demonstrating how credit earned by these methodologies can be applied to curriculums.

The concept included as Phase I the progressive assignment by SOC of course category numbers to service school credit recommendations, military occupational experience, testing, and other forms of nontraditional learning, and inclusion of this new information in the SOC-DP Program. Phase I resulted in the development of the *SOCAD and SOCNAV Credit Evaluation Supplements,* described in detail below.

Phase II of the SOC-DP concept is the unfunded automated portion. The automated SOC-DP, if funded, would to yield, for the information of the counselor, servicemember, and college personnel, three products:

- a "summary Student Evaluation" that lists credit recommendations based on the individual servicemembers background;
- an "automated draft DD295," that could assist in the preparation of a final version that verifies input data; and
- a draft SOC Student Agreement or "contract for degree." This draft will depict academic credit already earned, recommended credit for military experience and schooling, and requirements remaining in the curriculum that is selected by the servicemember. Also depicted will be options for fulfilling remaining requirements through testing.

Phase II will begin once DANTES funds a contract for production of the software.

SOCAD and SOCNAV Credit Evaluation Supplements

Phase I of SOC-DP produced the *Credit Evaluation Supplement* to the *SOCAD* and *SOCNAV Handbooks.* This supplement serves as a comprehensive reference document regarding credit recommendations and their possible use within the SOC networking systems. It allows system users to work immediately with a more manageable publication that combines the following sources of credit:

- *ACE Guide* recommendations for Army MOSs/Navy Rates and Ratings
- *ACE Guide* recommendations for Army/Navy service schools
- ACE recommended credit for national testing programs
- ACE recommended credit for CYBIS courses
- CCAF Course Credit Tables
- *DANTES Independent Study Catalog* Code Tables

All the credit recommendations in the supplement are related to SOC course category numbers.

SOC curriculum specialists analyzed each credit recommendation for a service school course, MOS/rates and ratings, and national tests to include CLEP, ACT/PEP, DSST, and ASE and compared the expected learning to college courses in existing SOC course categories. When a comparable match was made, SOC category numbers were assigned to credit recommendations, thus making it easier for evaluators to award military credit directly to degree programs. With the completion of Phase I, the major "gaps" in SOCAD and SOCNAV systems have been eliminated.

Improving Access to Education to Citizen-Soldiers (The Army National Guard)

In the active forces, the education center on the military installation is the focal point for servicemembers to access the educational process. It is there that a servicemember goes to obtain counseling, financial aid, and referral to a college or university that can meet his or her educational needs or aspirations. Reservists face a different situation. Many of these "weekend warriors" go to an armory or reserve center once a month for Saturday and Sunday training and then serve a two-week active-duty period each year. Until the 1980s, civilian educational opportunities for reservists and National Guard personnel were simply not part of the military agenda. In the early 1980s the *Army Plan* called for the extension of the Army Continuing Education System to the Reserve Component. This included tuition assistance for postsecondary programs. In addition, the Montgomery G-I Bill included provisions for members of the Reserve Components to participate, but at a reduced rate.

Each state adjutant general's office has a designated "education services officer" to assist guard personnel within that state with their educational activities. In some states this education services officer has a small staff. Many battalion-size units have an NCO appointed as education services officer as an additional duty. These NCOs often have little training in education, and limited time and educational resources. Tuition assistance funding for Reserve Components was eliminated in 1991, causing reservists and Guard members to rely on the Montgomery GI Bill and other types of financial aid. Subsequent attempts to restore funding have been unsuccessful. Consequently, the fledging beginning of voluntary educational development of these servicemembers has been tenuous at best. To further complicate this situation, colleges and universities not located near active military installations often were unaware of these servicemembers and their special educational needs. These institutions were not likely to recognize reserve servicemembers as potential candidates for their continuing education programs. They were often unfamiliar with the blending of traditional and nontraditional education opportunities that has proven successful with active servicemembers.

In February 1989, SOC, working closely with the National Guard Bureau, set about making colleges and universities aware of the educational needs of Guard members by establishing the **SOC Army National Guard Outreach Program,** later referred to as **SOCGuard**. Initially focusing on recruiting colleges and universities for SOC membership in seven states, several strategies were tried. Working through the central office, a highly qualified education specialist from the SOC staff conducted SOC workshops for representatives of colleges and universities targeted for participation in the Outreach initiative. In addition, State education services officers arranged visits to key institutions' campuses where the SOC specialist and the Army National Guard education services officer, together, presented the SOC story to presidents, vice presidents, and /or deans and solicited these institutions' interest in serving the National Guard soldier. In each workshop and meeting the emphasis focused on the recognition and use of the American Council on Education's *Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services* and the award of appropriate credit for learning demonstrated through standardized tests such as CLEP, ACT/PEP, and DSST. While reasonable transfer of credit practices and limitations on institutional residency requirements remain important, they become secondary to the actual blending of academic credits earned through accepted nontraditional methods into traditional degree programs for Army National Guard students .

In early 1993, SOC Army National Guard Outreach Program transitioned into "SOCGuard" with a focus both on recruiting and retaining college capable ARNG servicemembers. The primary objective of SOCGuard is to integrate postsecondary education with ARNG recruiting and retention activities. It consists of two independent but interrelated programs: "Recruiting through Education" and "Retention through Education." Recruiting through Education is accomplished through the Concurrent Admissions Program

Plus (ConAP+). New soldiers apply and gain admission to local SOC colleges simultaneously with their enlistment in the ARNG with enrollment deferred for up to 2 years following completion of Initial Active Duty for Training (IADT). Retention through Education encourages new and current ARNG soldiers to apply for admission to and enroll at their selected SOC colleges.

SOCGuard encourages the use of the Montgomery G-I Bill and degree planning for Army National Guard students. The *SOC Principles and Criteria* are recognized as the common framework in which postsecondary institutions address educational needs of the military student whether active, reserve, veteran or adult family member. The message of the SOC model has begun to permeate higher education well beyond the boundaries of active military installations.

College Access for New Army Recruits:

In 1989, SOC launched a program designed to reach the prospective Army recruit. The **Concurrent Admissions Program**, better known as ConAP, was an undertaking by the higher education community and the Army Recruiting Command to increase college enrollment of veterans by pre-enrolling new soldiers in a college or university of their choice concurrent with their enlistment in the Army.

ConAP began as a pilot effort in the 11 northeastern states and the District of Columbia with the 1st U.S. Recruiting Brigade, then expanded to include the 2nd U.S. Recruiting Brigade, and, in 1991, was opened to encompass all recruiting areas throughout the United States. Army recruiters refer prospective soldiers to participating colleges and universities in their home communities. Eligible recruits are admitted on a full or provisional basis, with admission deferred until completion of active military service. Provisional admission means that admission is guaranteed but that the student may be required to take certain foundation courses or undergo other academic preparation as determined by the college and may be limited in the number of courses undertaken. The student is subject to the college catalog in effect at the time of enrollment in classes at the college. The agreement is in effect for two years following completion of active military service. Both the Army and the college maintain contact with ConAP soldiers during their military service to encourage off-duty study and to bond soldiers with their ConAP college. In essence, the new ConAP soldier begins his or her Army service with a "home college" and a definite plan to enroll in college using the Montgomery GI Bill.

All accredited colleges and universities in the United States have been encouraged to participate in ConAP. To participate, they must subscribe to the *SOC Principles and Criteria* and become a member of SOC. This assures ConAP soldiers that their specific "home college" will blend the academic credits earned while in the military, either by traditional or nontraditional means, with their degree programs after leaving the Army. Again, similar to the Army National Guard Outreach, ConAP is helping spread the SOC model throughout the higher education community. In 1992, ConAP was extended to the Army National Guard. This is intended to help the National Guard attract a higher percentage of recruits who are college capable (Mental Category IIIA and higher).

Access to Teacher Preparation:

The Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Education Program is a program designed to help soldiers and sailors begin preparing for a new career in teaching while they are still on active duty. This is a Department of Defense program that has been integrated into SOCAD-4, SOCNAV-4, and SOCMAR-4. SOC officially launched SOCED with the publication of the Fall 1992 *SOCAD* and *SOCNAV Handbooks*. This initiative provides servicemember-participants a foundation from which to pursue teacher certification as

military service ends. It expands the teacher applicant pool to include some dedicated, highly motivated, and disciplined servicemembers from diverse backgrounds.

SOC has compiled a list of eight core course that are basic to most teacher preparatory programs regardless of which state, grade level or subject a future teacher chooses. Completion of these courses do not guarantee certification or licensure in any state but they are intended to advance the servicemember closer to that desired goal. The "SOCED CORE" includes:

Education Psychology
Foundations of Education
Introduction to Education
Human Growth and Development
Strategies of Teaching
Learning Theories
Classroom Management
Computers in Education

The eight courses of the SOCED CORE standing alone constitute a non-degree program. Thirty-nine colleges and universities have indicated a willingness to participate in this effort. Its purpose is to provide a selection of professional education courses that will be useful in most certification programs and whose transferability is guaranteed within the SOCED CORE non-degree network. All participating colleges do not offer all courses; state certification programs require different combinations of courses; and, rarely will all eight be required by any one certification program.

Access to Education through Developmental Coursework:

The U. S. Navy's college preparatory Program (SOCNAVPREP) is a developmental education effort sponsored by the Navy beginning in FY 1992. It is designed for the sailor who, although a high school graduate, is not quite ready for college. Some sailors already take developmental courses at local community colleges to bridge the gap into college level courses. But many do not. Existing programs are often viewed as remedial rather than developmental. Many sailors are not even aware that such developmental courses exist. The challenge for SOCNAVPREP is first to identify and target sailors who, on their own, would not be knocking on Navy Campus or College doors and, secondly, to motivate and encourage these sailors to take advantage of SOCNAVPREP opportunities.

SOCNAVPREP is an attempt to "package" developmental courses into a more positive context that focuses on preparation for college rather than on remediation of basic skills. The program leads to a college preparatory certificate signed by the College and the sailor's Commanding Officer. This positive focus and recognition of achievement should encourage more sailors to take that first step toward a college degree.

Much of the effort to identify and motivate this new segment of sailor population, that is, those who have not yet approached Navy Campus or the colleges, lies with the local command to which the sailor is assigned or attached. Commanding Officers, Command Career Counselors and local Education Services Officers are being made aware of this college preparatory program. They, in turn, must make it clear to the sailor that education benefits the servicemember both in terms of self development and career enhancement.

Outreach to Veterans:

Although no formal veterans' outreach program currently exists within SOC, civilian SOC institutions provide veterans returning to civilian life appropriate evaluation of their training, experience, and prior study similar to that afforded active and reserve servicemembers. SOC Principles and Criteria recognize the continuing educational needs of veterans by having SOC institutions:

- encourage veterans to continue or complete study started during service or interrupted by duty requirements;
- offer opportunities to veterans similar to those extended to servicemembers under the SOC Criteria, including provision of information and counseling services to ensure that veterans are aware of the benefits, regulations and potential problems of veterans' assistance programs;
- comply with the provisions of 38 United States Code 1775 on veterans' assistance programs; and
- provide veterans, previously admitted as SOC students, with opportunities to complete their programs under the conditions of their Student Agreements. (*SOC Principles and Criteria, 1995-1997,* p. 7)

For example, if a veteran has a Student Agreement executed while on active-duty, he or she may be able to attend a local institution to complete associate or bachelor's degree requirements, even if the local college is not a member of the SOC consortium. The SOC "home college" that initiated the Student Agreement should be disposed to accept the credits, though some require approval in advance. If the veteran has completed all the academic residency requirements of his or her "home college", then degree completion with that "home college" should be relatively simple. A few colleges do have a time limit on degree completions, however. Hence the veteran should maintain contact with the "home college" to ensure a full understanding of the academic and administrative requirements and limits regarding the Student Agreement.

Many colleges will work closely with the veteran and will use the Student Agreement. If the local college is a SOC member, it will award credit for Army service school courses based on the ACE *Guide*. It may also award credit based on the veteran's military experience (MOS). Veterans are advised to search out a Veterans Counselor or a SOC Counselor or representative at their local college and, as a minimum, to inquire with the college's admission officer or registrar about possible credit based on their military training and experience.

Access for the Adult Family Members of Servicemembers:

SOC has no formal outreach to adult family members of servicemembers. Nevertheless, it does recognize the postsecondary education needs of this large segment of the military community. As previously noted, the enlisted force in all the military services includes over a million adult family members (*Defense* 92 p. 31). Often these people have both the time and the inclination to participate in educational programs. Many supporting colleges and universities rely on adult family members to comprise numbers sufficient to justify offering specific courses on a military installation.

Adult family members are subject to many of the same adverse circumstances that their military sponsors face, such as frequent moves. They also need to blend traditional and nontraditional educational opportunities into credible degree programs. One major additional hurdle is funding. Since adult family members are not eligible for tuition assistance through the military and generally are not entitled to veterans' educational benefits, they must pay full tuition, fees and book costs out-of-pocket or through grants, loans, or scholarships obtained through the civilian sector. Adult family members need counseling, degree planning, financial aid, and availability of programs tailored to meet their needs and educational aspirations.

In recognition of adult family member educational needs, all SOCAD-4, SOCNAV, and SOCMAR colleges and most SOCAD-2 colleges accept family members on the same basis as military students. They are given official evaluations, issued SOC Student Agreements and provided the same transfer guarantees granted soldiers and sailors. These institutions advise adult family members regarding academic matters and financial aid. Some of them, such as Park College, offer scholarships to particularly worthy adult family members to encourage their educational development. Many within the military services understand that the welfare of adult family members is directly tied to servicemembers' retention and job performance. Postsecondary educational opportunities are factors that contribute to a positive living environment for servicemembers.

SOC Management

The SOC Director and current staff of sixteen employees and four consultants comprise the SOC office, which is located at Suite 680, National Center for Higher Education, One Dupont Circle, NW, Washington, DC. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) is the administrative and fiscal agent for the SOC contract Funding for SOC is provided by that contract with DANTES, on behalf of Department of Defense and the military services.

The professional civilian staff of SOC provides the expertise, the flexibility to meet changing mission requirements, and the dedication to high quality adult and continuing education needed to serve as principal advocates for education in American society today. (See Figure 2 for relative level of effort by SOC staff.) The SOC Director and staff have the following functions:

- Review and recommend modifications to the *SOC Principles and Criteria* to reflect changes or expansion of SOC's mission, and work with the SOC Advisory Board and DoD to gain approval of these changes.
- Develop networking systems for degree programs in traditional delivery alternative delivery and learning assessment options.
- Produce the publications required to sustain SOC and its degree programs (handbooks, work books, and guides).
- Develop and maintain data bases to support education management efforts and specific degree networks and programs.
- Conduct training workshops to inform military education and civilian academic personnel about SOC and its programs.
- Conduct an assessments of higher education programs, identify model efforts, pinpoint weaknesses and problem areas, and develop recommendations for improvement.
- Develop, produce and distribute information newsletters, pamphlets, posters and other items to inform servicemembers and others about SOC.

- Provide an "on call" capability to respond to requests for assistance from field education specialists or users of SOC education programs or services.
- Represent SOC at meetings of educational organizations and associations, to keep the education community informed about SOC and to promote acceptance of *SOC Principles and Criteria*.
- Coordinate and participate in advisory groups, panels, etc. to provide service, guidance, or information on education issues, when requested by the military services, DANTES, or Department of Defense.

The SOC model incorporates essential elements for program management of higher education. These include:

- A uniform, articulated code of good educational practice subscribed to by educational institutions offering similar educational programs and services;
- Encouraging compliance with this code of good educational practice among supporting institutions;
- Systematic availability of informed education counseling and program planning (documented in a written agreement between an educational institution and each student);
- Collection and analysis of data to assist in determining program cost benefit;
- Training of those involved in the operation and administration of higher education programs;
- Information gathering and distribution (emphasizing the availability of educational opportunities and ways to take advantage of them); and
- Facilitation, coordination, information feedback, and troubleshooting capability.

The SOC model has possible applications to business and industry as well as other federal sectors besides the military. As organizations and agencies look for ways to improve their adult learning opportunities, the SOC model may prove useful for :

(1) improving communications between the higher education community and the user organizations;

(2) blending of traditional and nontraditional education;

(3) understanding of the responsibilities and functions for all parties concerned;

(4) networking degree programs; and

(5) troubleshooting problem areas and implementation weaknesses.

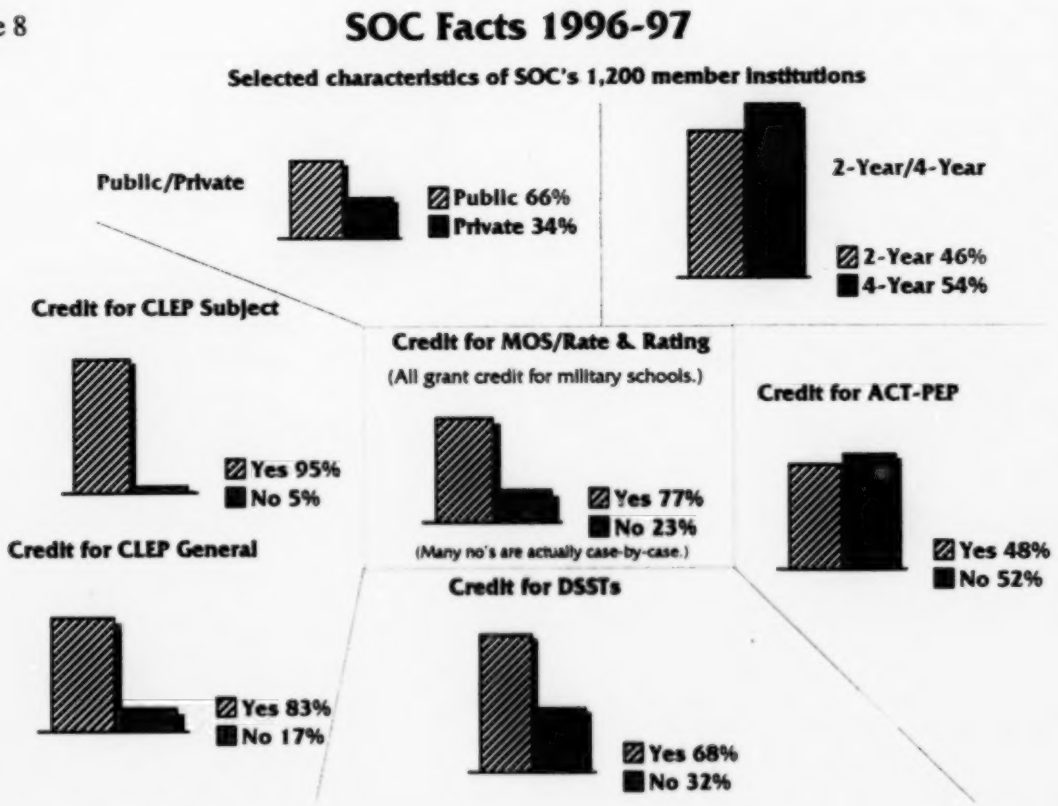
SOC Performance

SOC has been successful at getting a wide range of traditional and nontraditional institutions to generally accept the *SOC Principles and Criteria*, and to recognize the special traits of the military adult learner. It must be acknowledged that many of the over 1200 SOC schools generally adhere to SOC principles, but they do not actively seek out opportunities to serve the military constituency. Other schools are far more active contributors. There is room for all of them. As a group they comprise the critical mass needed to support the array of programs described in this section. (A college focusing its efforts on ConAP, for

example, might lean more toward the traditional than if it were an active participant in the SOCAD system. Both schools are making valuable contributions, in consonance with the needs of their military constituencies.)

(Figure 8 shows, among other data, several ways to look at SOC institutions.)

Figure 8



Participation in SOC degree programs is gathering momentum. There is a steeply rising curve of newly-initiated "contracts," or Student Agreements between SOC schools and active-duty servicemembers. In fact, the proportion of SOC Student Agreements among soldiers has risen as the size of the force has declined (Figure 5).

In a 1987 research study of perceptions and attitudes of participating soldiers in SOCAD, Frederick Copeland found 85% of the SOCAD participants reported that they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the overall operation of the system. The same percentage of participants indicated satisfaction with the educational services provided by SOCAD colleges. One-fourth of the respondents agreed that involvement in SOCAD had encouraged them to stay in the Army. Copeland concluded from his research that the SOCAD system "was perceived by the respondents to be very effective and highly respected program that is meeting its goal of providing soldiers the opportunity to earn associate degrees in selected technical areas" (Copeland, 1987, pp. ii, iii).

In the 1989 Department of Defense-funded study on *Problems Faced by Military Personnel in Pursuing Higher Education Program*, the American Council on Education, in consort with the American Associa-

tion of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and the American Association of Community Colleges, found a "surprisingly low profile of Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) programs" and urged postsecondary education institutions and associations to join SOC and adhere to SOC principles (Stewart, et al, 1989, p.2).

Conclusions:

For 25 years, the U. S. Government has sponsored, in the Department of Defense, a unique model for providing access to education to servicemembers, a population that might otherwise have been denied an equal opportunity to obtain a college degree. Recognizing that military men and women are often unable to attend college at traditional sites and in traditional ways, the higher education community established Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges to find ways to accommodate the unique needs of the military student without compromising standards for quality education. A national-level SOC Advisory Board provides policy guidance for SOC.

Flexible policies on residency requirements, transfer of credit, and the blending of traditional and nontraditional approaches to coursework were developed. Hundreds of colleges joined in the effort, and the United States Congress provided funds to administer the consortium, assist in paying tuition, and maintain counselors and facilities on military posts. Programs to emphasize education for servicemembers evolved. These include degree networks, outreach to the National Guard, a teacher preparation program, and a pilot program with the Navy in developmental education.

SOC has been successful for over two decades. Nearly twelve hundred colleges and universities conform to *SOC Principles and Criteria* aimed at providing access to education for servicemembers that compensates for their unique circumstances and learning environments. Nearly two hundred institutions participate in highly integrated degree networks that have allowed thousands on men and women to graduate with degrees.

At a time when the U.S. military is becoming smaller but increasingly technical, it is vital to provide higher education opportunity for those who will operate the forces. The Department of Defense, the military services, and the higher education community will continue to collaborate to provide those opportunities

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